

**CLAIMS**

1      *Sub a)* 1. An apparatus for filling a pouch having an opening with a  
2      product, said apparatus comprising:

3                a hood having at least one wall defining a passageway, said passageway  
4      being open to air from outside said hood, said hood having means for dispersing  
5      pressurized gas into said passageway to displace said air from outside said hood;

6                a fill tube extending into said passageway of said hood to dispense  
7      product for filling said pouch; and

8                means for moving said pouch into said passageway to said fill tube, said  
9      means for moving supporting said opening of said pouch in said pressurized gas  
10     while product from said fill tube is dispensed into said pouch.

1      2. The apparatus as set forth in claim 1, further comprising a first  
2      nozzle mounted to said hood and extending into said passageway upstream of  
3      said fill tube for injecting gas into said pouch to purge oxygen from said pouch.

1      *4/* 3. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a second nozzle  
2      mounted to said hood and extending into said passageway downstream of said  
3      fill tube for injecting a supply of gas into said pouch to purge oxygen from said  
4      pouch.

1      *A. 33* 4. The apparatus as set forth in claim 2, further comprising means  
2      for reciprocally moving said nozzle in a vertical direction to move said nozzle  
3      into and away from said pouch.

1      5. The apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein said hood further  
2      comprises a collar extending around said fill tube and fluidly connected to said  
3      supply of gas, said collar delivering a supply of gas around said fill tube.

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1           6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said means for moving  
2 comprises a turret.

1           7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said means for dispersing  
2 comprises a dispersion plate mounted to said hood and having a plurality of  
3 perforations.

4           8. A method of filling a pouch having an opening with a product,  
5 said method comprising:

6           opening said pouch;  
7           purging oxygen from said pouch with a supply of gas;  
8           moving said pouch through a hood;  
9           dispersing a supply of gas around said opening of said pouch from said  
10          hood;  
11          filling said pouch with a product while under said hood;  
12          sealing said pouch.

1           9. The method of claim 8, before said filling step, further  
2 comprising purging said oxygen from said pouch with a supply of gas.

1           10. The method of claim 8, wherein said filling step further  
2 comprises surrounding said product with a flow of gas.

1           11. The method of claim 8, after said filling step, further comprising  
2 the step of purging said filled pouch with gas.

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